

# West Nile Virus (WNV) Fact Sheet

## What is WNV?

West Nile Virus is one of several mosquito-borne viruses in the US that can infect people. The principle carriers of WNV are numerous species of wild birds. Humans are infected with WNV when they are bitten by a certain species of mosquitoes, which have recently bitten an infected bird. Humans can not be infected with WNV from birds. West Nile Virus is capable of causing fatal neurological disease, such as encephalitis, in humans and horses and also can cause death in certain wild birds.

## What are the symptoms of WNV?

- Many people have no illness
- Some may experience mild flu-like illness that includes fever, headache and body aches that only last a few days

**Note:** Less than one percent of those infected may develop meningitis or encephalitis, the most severe forms of the disease requiring medical care. This occurs primarily in persons over 50 years of age. Symptoms of encephalitis or meningitis may include:

- |                   |                  |                   |
|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| • severe headache | • stupor         | • paralysis       |
| • high fever      | • disorientation | • coma            |
| • neck stiffness  | • convulsions    | • sometimes death |

## How is WNV spread?

West Nile virus is spread to humans by the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes acquire WNV by biting a bird that has the virus. The virus is NOT spread by person-to-person contact and cannot be spread directly from birds to people. (Note: dead birds should still not be handled with bare hands).

## What can you do to protect yourself?

The best way to protect yourself is to keep mosquitoes from biting you. During mosquito season (generally April through October), take the following precautions:

- Limit outdoor activities between dusk and dawn, if possible, since this is the time of greatest mosquito activity
- If you are outside when mosquitoes are prevalent, wear protective clothing such as long pants, long-sleeved shirts and socks.
- Use a mosquito repellant that contains DEET (the chemical N-N-diethyl-meta-toluamide) and follow the directions on the label.

## What can I do around my home to help reduce exposure to mosquitoes?

- Dispose of, regularly empty, or turn over any water holding containers on your property such as tires, cans, flowerpots, or trashcans.
- Drill holes in the bottom of recycling containers that are left outdoors.
- Make sure roof gutters drain properly and water doesn't stand in them.
- Change the water in birdbaths at least once a week.
- Turn over plastic wading pools and wheelbarrows when not in use.
- Keep swimming pools, outdoor saunas and hot tubs clean and properly chlorinated; remove standing water from pool covers.
- Eliminate any standing water that collects on your property.
- Remind or help neighbors to eliminate mosquito-breeding sites.
- Fix any holes in your screens and make sure they are tightly attached.

## Does a dead bird in my community mean WNV is in the area?

An increase in deaths in crows and blue jays can be an indication of WNV circulating in an area. However, risk to humans will be very low since less than 1% of mosquitoes will be able to transmit the virus; and less than 1% of people who get bitten by a mosquito and become infected will get severely ill.

## What should I do if I find a dead crow or blue jay?

If you notice a **freshly dead crow or blue jay**, you should contact your local health department's environmental or vector control section or to see about testing. To keep it from deteriorating in the heat, you should place it in a plastic bag (hand in bag, grasp bird, pull bag over hand), double bag and refrigerate, freeze or keep on ice until delivered or picked up. Not every bird reported will be submitted for testing, especially after WNV is already known to be in the area.

**For more information contact 1-800-525-2437 or <http://www2.state.tn.us/health/CEDS/wnvhome.htm>**